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Validation of the teacher education center capabilities to train qualified teachers in the field of teaching from the perspective of academic experts

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Abstract

A survey was done by the researchers in July 2010 in order to gain student subjects' estimation of teacher education centers ability to educate highly competent teachers and that of the instructor subjects. There was a significant difference between these two group viewpoints from this respect ($p < 0.01$). In the current study, the results of the first study were validated by interviewing 5 academic education specialists in Education and Psychology College in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran in order to better identification of current status of these centers in educating highly competent teachers. The analysis of the interviews in the study revealed that the results of the first study were not valid at least in some subcomponents of teacher competences and a multi-perspective estimation is needed for an integrated teaching performance evaluation.

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1. Introduction

Katane (cf. Selvi, 2010) describes competences as a group of necessary knowledge, skills and experiences an individual has or acquires. Gupta (cf. Selvi, 2010) defines competences as a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, motivations and beliefs individuals apply for their occupational success. Teacher professional competences are skills and abilities that teachers should have to succeed in class and present an effective teaching process. Some researchers identify teacher competences as teachers teaching abilities. Others relate them to teachers' all professional aspects.

Enumerating the responsibilities of teachers pertaining to three groups: students, education institutions and society, Aelterman (cf. Katrien Struyven and DeMeyst, 2010) considered some competences teachers need to fulfill these responsibilities: The teacher as guide of learning and development, educator, subject expert, organizer, innovative & researcher, partner of the parents/carers, member of a teaching team, partner of external parties, member of the educational community, and The teacher as culture participant. Ballantyne et al. (1998) specify 5

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teacher competences for an apprentice teacher including : having a particular type of personality, being a subject expert, being a skilled manager, having a professional approach and having control of the class. Education Department of Capital University of Columbus, Ohio (2010) regards the following competences for teacher candidates: Teachers understand student learning and development, Teachers know and understand the content area for which they have instructional responsibility, Teachers understand and use varied assessments to inform instruction, evaluate and ensure student learning , Teachers plan and deliver effective instruction that advances the learning of each individual student., Teachers create learning environments that promote high levels of learning and achievement for all students , Teachers collaborate and communicate with students, parents, other educators, administrators and the community to support student learning , Teachers assume responsibility for professional growth, performance, and involvement as an individual and as a member of a learning community. Pantic and Wubbels (2009) enumerate some competences for teachers such as 1) values and child-rearing. 2) understanding of the education system and contribution to its development. 3) subject knowledge, pedagogy and curriculum. and 4) self-evaluation and professional development. Australian Council for Educational Research (2010) includes teacher competences in 7 standards: 1) Know their students and how they learn, 2) Know the content and how to teach it, 3) Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning, 4) Create and maintain safe, and supportive learning environments, 5) Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning, 6) Engage in professional learning and reflection, 7) Contribute to the school and professional community. Tom Bisschoff & bennie Grobler (1998) for teacher evaluation focused on eight aspects

(theoretical constructs) of teacher competence, namely: the learning environment, the professional commitment of the teacher, discipline, the educational foundation of the teacher, teacher reflection, cooperative ability of the teacher, effectiveness and leadership styles. combs (1996) regards teacher competences from conceptual view and puts them into rich and effortful conception of education field, accurate and rational conception of people, complete conception of learning processes and goals and personally-directed conception of their own goals and so on. Maleky (1994) indicates some characteristics for a teacher including: Having skills in classroom management, personal skills, social relations, basic knowledge, ethics and commitment, ICT skills and new teaching skills. It can be said that researchers, specialists and scientific centers have been considered teacher competences from various perspectives .

Regarding these, we can divide teacher competences into some categories: teacher knowledge competences (e.g., expertise, understanding of curriculum content, basic knowledge and knowledge of education), teacher personality competences (e.g., student orientation, responsibility and participation) and teacher teaching competences (e.g., familiarity with new teaching methods, control of class, membership in teaching groups and associations). Then, integrating these viewpoints and other educationists' viewpoints on these competences reveals that the competences can be divided into 3 broad categories: teacher's personality, teacher's personal knowledge, and teacher's teaching skills. These all may be taught to student-teachers in teacher education centers. What is very important is that highly competent teachers in each education system are a main and inevitable necessity.

Disregarding any categorization, highly competent teachers are necessary for a successful education system. Teachers are core parts of education systems and can result in great changes and reforms in educational trends (Hejazi, 2009).

International Commission of Education for 21th Century (cf.raoof,2000) promoted the notion that teacher education is a start point of education movements and changes. Federiko Mayer, the previous UNESCO Secretary-General says that if we want to change in social life, we must begin from schools and this necessitate starting from teachers. Most countries have detected the importance of teacher -school- society relations and their teacher education centers have begun changing related curricula by regarding their capacities and strengths. Teachers with insufficient skills and inadequate competences are of main obstacles to this achievement and defeat any programming. Besides, society's expectation of teacher performances in our ever-changing environment necessitates changing and promoting teacher competences (Sha'bani, 2006). Then, the evaluation of teacher education centers in educating highly competent teachers has become a hot topic for researchers of education field. In Iran, several universities and teacher education centers/colleges under supervision of The Ministry of Education are responsible for educating student-teachers. In recent years, the role of teacher education centers has been predominant. The

estimation and evaluation of these centers' activities and performances is of research interests. In a survey done previously by the researchers (here, the first study), it was found that the student subjects' estimation of teacher education centers ability to educate highly competent teachers was significantly different from that of the instructor subjects. In the current study (here, the second study), the results of the first study were validated by some academic education specialists in Education and Psychology College in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad in order to better identification of current status of these centers in educating highly competent teachers.

2. Method

The first study was done with the participation of 188 students and 31 instructors among 790 students and instructors in two main teacher education centers located in Mashhad during July 2010. For preparation of a researcher-made questionnaire, the competences an effective teacher needs were identified by considering some specialists viewpoints in the field of teacher education and 25 items in Likert-type scale were extracted. These items were integrated and placed in 3 broad components: "teacher personality competences" in 7 items, "teacher teaching competences" in 10 items and "teacher personal knowledge" in 8 items. The subjects were asked to complete this 25-item questionnaire. Collected data was statistically analyzed by SPSS software. In the second (current) study, a semi-structured interview, as a qualitative research method was used for data collection. 5 academic teacher education specialists in Education and Psychology College in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad were interviewed about the results of the first study. The interviews were summarized descriptively and analyzed.

3. Results

The results of the first study were summarized below. The students' estimation of teacher education centers' ability to educate highly competent teachers was in "relatively good" range. However, the instructors' estimation of these centers' ability to educate highly competent teachers was in "good" range. There was a significant difference between these two groups from this respect ($p < 0.01$) (Table 1).

Table 1. The comparison of students and instructors' views about teacher education centers' ability to educate highly competent teachers by three competences components

Component	Groups	n	Mean	St. deviation	St. error	t	df	Sig
Personality	Instructors	31	26/50	2/78	0/4998	2/47	217	0/01*
	Students	188	24/17	4/37	0/3187			
Teaching	Instructors	31	30/90	2/48	0/4462	3/45	217	0/001**
	Students	188	27/69	5/05	0/3686			
Personal Knowledge	Instructors	31	21/66	1/95	0/3509	2/97	217	0/003**
	Students	188	19/65	3/65	0/2668			
Total	Instructors	31	79/07	6/35	1/14	3/22	217	0/001**
	Students	188	71/88	12/12	0/8844			

$p < .01$ ** $p < .05$. *

The results of the second study were summarized as follows. It is necessary to indicate that the disagreement between students and instructors in the first study was 60% being obtained by statistical analysis and was statistically significant. The analysis of the interviews in the second study revealed that the results of the former study were not valid at least in some teacher competence sub-components. In other words, Iran's teacher education

centers have rarely succeeded in educating highly competent teachers, at least in some aspects and teachers who have graduated from these centers and currently teach in various educational centers have not sufficient and effective competences for teaching. Then, the results of the first study, especially those indicating the instructors viewpoints, is not valid enough. The implications of this can be discussed in both major and minor levels.

In major level:

1. The slight comparison and minimum view of these centers and the colleges with relatively similar performances, especially education colleges show a far distance between these two centers.
2. Replacement of secondary and marginal performances of these centers with primary and core performances separates them from their responsibilities.

In minor level:

1. The students' estimation appears to be closer to reality than the instructors' estimation.
2. These estimations were based on learnt teaching and teaching in practice is certainly more complex and hard to be estimated and measured in primary surveyed estimations. Ultimate and real estimation of teaching can be done only after observing the subjects through their practical teaching.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the first study showed a significant difference between the students and instructors' estimations of teacher education centers ability to educate highly competent teachers. Hence, the results of the second study revealed that there was a disagreement between these instructors and academic specialists on estimating this ability. This is considerable. It appears that in the estimation of these centers' performances, various viewpoints in different levels may be taken into account: students' viewpoints in low level, instructors' viewpoints in middle level and academic specialists' viewpoints in high level. Regarding different awareness and knowledge level each of these group has, it is expected that they differently analyze the status.

As a result, an appropriate instrument should be used in each level in order to gain justified and rational estimation or judgment and then, the results are applied for decision-making. For example, in minor perspective, students are important and in major one, instructors and academic specialists should be taken into account. A multi-level perspective is the optimum for an integrated decision-making process. However, the comparison of instructors and academic specialists' perspectives is more important and significant than those of instructors and students because of the possibility of some interfering factors in the latter. For example, as noted by the interviewed academic specialists, instructors' estimation of their own teaching may be biased and students' estimation of their instructor' teaching is rationally close to real situation.

As noted by many students and instructors in these centers, the managerial structure and organizational chart of the centers are heavily influenced by the environment dominated in Iran's public education system, specially its schools. The centers are conceived as a transition between school and university and are under supervision of The Ministry of Education. Then, school management styles and perspectives appear to be dominant than academic management approaches in these centers.

Considering the results of the first and second studies and all three involved groups (students, instructors and academic specialists), some suggestions can be proposed in major and minor levels. In the minor level, it is needed:

1. To modify the student-teacher admission regulations and procedures;
2. To revise the instructor employment regulations and procedures with emphasis on scientific abilities and teaching competences (software equipment);
3. To combine learnt teaching with teaching in practice;
4. To increase the centers' budget and facilities.

In the major level, it is needed:

1. To accurately evaluate the activities and abilities of these centers by a big national-wide research projects;

2. To form a study group consisting of policy-makers, experts, instructors, students and so on in order to redefine the goals, content, methods and elements of curricula of teacher education centers based on new scientific outputs in education field;
3. To identify the new competences and skills teachers need in e-learning and role-changing environments of our age;
4. To change and reorganize the educational and scientific structure of these centers based on academic patterns.

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